Views and Reviews in the World of Art

By HENRY McBRIDE.

Artists, with reason, complain of this time of dissensions, of universal turmoil. It is said that painting preeminently requires the peaceful olive branch. Hearts which listen anxiously whether or not the war trumpets sound have certainly not the necessary attention to give to sweet music. The opera is listened to with deaf ears; the ballet is watched with but partial attention. "It is the fault of that accursed July revolution," sigh the artists, and they forswear liberty and tiresome politics, which absorb everything and everyone to their detriment.

HEINE, in Paris, 1831.

THE artistic recompense from war is sure, but the method and the time of reimbursement are uncertain. Only the foolish will pretend to an exact knowledge of the forms that the artistic expression of this war will take, but the wise at least know, and not alone from reading Heine, that it will take form. That may be cold comfort to the foolish, but it is sufficient for those who have philosophy.

I put Heine's remark at the beginning of this articles because it represents not the final but the first effect of war upon artists—it is almost an exact reproduction of the sentiments one overhears to-day at the Century, the Coffee House, at the Players and at all other resorts for elderly and successful artists—but it has nothing in common with the feeling of the young men who joyfully laid aside their sophomoric college tasks for robuster duties at the front and who are to be our artists of the future. Heine, who knew by history other turmoils than the one in the midst of which he wrote in 1831, knew that the history of art (and of life) is made up of periods of peace and periods of war, and that as far as art is concerned the greatest of these periods are those of war. I will give you his handsome reputation at the end of this little bundle of quotations (for I intend to speak through others) so that an article that starts off badly may have a good ending.

What we made from our civil war pictorially is hard to define. We made distinctly from it in literature, simply because, I think, our literature had been longer and more firmly established than our art had been. We will make again inevitably in literature and probably definitely, since we are older at it, in the arts.

I have always felt, but cannot prove it, that the foundations of Winslow Homer's strength were laid in his formative civil war experiences. It is impossible that he cannot have had some of the emotions that fell to Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, two or our most native and powerful writers, and if he had them they must have affected him in an equally spiritual way, since his was a nature as responsive as theirs to the great.

This, too, in spite of the fact that his was a slowly revealed talent and was scarcely suggested by the actual work he did during the conflict. The drawings he made for periodicals and his paintings of that epoch were honest, searching and even broad. That is almost as much as may be said for them. They were drawings that had to be looked at. They had something in them that an intelligent mind had torn from life at first hand. They were respectable attainments for any artist to have accomplished—but had Winslow Homer died at that time America would not have had the giant artist painting for almost the first time with the genuine American accent to be proud of. Something developed Winslow Homer. Something taught him something that cannot be learned in schools. If it were not the emotional impulses of the war that stirred him it might have been. In writers such soul evolutions may be traced, since words are their media and all their steps are recorded, but with painters it is different. One may only divine.

Reaching out along my book shelves in support of this theory that the soul (and consequently the artist) reaches true nobility through profound emotion, I drew out two books by the writers already mentioned, Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Indeed their books are usually within elbow reach of my desk and always there when I feel the need to be especially American.

Without much searching I fastened upon the passages I shall quote. It is impossible to read them now without being moved. It would have been clearly impossible for any one with the germ of an artist in him to have had such contacts with life without either dying of sheer sympathy or immeasurably expanding as an artist.

Drawing by Purcell Jones, at the Knoedler Galleries. Mr. Jones, who was wounded in battle, has resumed his career as an artist.

In Whitman's "Specimen Days" is this:

"March 27, 1865. Sergeant Calvin F. Harlowe, Company C, Twenty-ninth Massachusetts, Third Brigade, First Division, Ninth Corps—a marked sample of heroism and death (some may say bavado, but I say heroism of grandest oldest order), in the late attack by rebel troops and temporary capture by them of Fort Steadman. The fort was surprised at dead of night. Suddenly awakened from their sleep and rushing from their tents, Harlowe with others found himself in the hands of the seesh—they demanded his surrender—he answered, 'Never while I live.'

"(Of course it was useless. The others surrendered; the odds were too great.) Again he was asked to yield, this time by a rebel Captain. Though surrounded and quite calm he again refused, called sternly to his comrades to fight on and himself attempted to do so. The rebel Captain then shot him, but at the same instant he shot the Captain. Both fell mortally wounded. Harlowe died almost instantly. The rebels were driven out in a very short time.

"The body was buried next day, but was soon taken up and sent home (Plymouth county, Mass). Harlowe was only 22 years of age, was a tall, slim, dark haired, blue eyed young man, had come out originally with the Twenty-ninth, and that is the way he met his death after four years campaign. He was in the Seven Days fight before Richmond, in second Bull Run, Antietam, first Fredericksburg, Vicksburg, Jackson, Wilderness and the campaign following; was as good a soldier as ever wore the blue and every old officer in the regiment will bear that testimony.

"Though so young and in a common rank he had a spirit as resolute and brave as any hero in the books, ancient or modern—it was too great to say the words 'I surrender' and so he died. (When I think of such things, knowing them well, all the vast and complicated events of the war on which history dwells and makes its volumes fall aside and for the moment at any rate I see nothing but young Calvin Harlowe's figure in the night disdaining to surrender)."

Walt put the heading, "A Yankee Antique" over the above entry in his journal. It would be possibly profane to add any comment to the picture.

In 1861 Emily Dickinson wrote to her cousins:

"Mrs. Adams had news of the death of her boy to-day from a wound at Annapolis. Telegram signed by Frazer Stearns. You remember him. Another one died in October from fever caught in the camp. Mrs. Adams herself has not risen from bed since then. Christ be merciful! Frazer Stearns is just leaving Annapolis. His father has gone to see him to-day. I hope that ruddy face won't be brought home frozen."

But four months later it was. In April, 1862, Emily wrote:

"DEAR CHILDREN: You have done more for me—'tis least that I can do to tell you of brave Frazer—'killed at Newbern,' darlings. His big heart shot away by a 'Minie ball.'

"I had read of those—I didn't think that Frazer would carry one to Eden with him. Just as he fell in his soldier's cap with his sword at his side Frazer rode through Amherst. Classmates to the right of him and classmates to the left of him to guard his narrow face! He fell by the side of Prof. Clark, his superior officer, lived ten minutes in a soldier's arms, asked twice for water, murmured just 'My God' and passed!

"Sanderson, his classmate, made a box of boards in the night, put the brave boy in, covered with a blanket, rowed six miles to reach the boat—so poor Frazer came. They tell that Prof. Clark cried like a child when he missed his pet and could hardly resume his post. They loved each other very much. Nobody here could look on Frazer—not even his father. The doctors would not allow it.

"So our part in Frazer is done, but you must come next summer and we will mind ourselves of this young crusader—too brave that he could fear to die. We will play his tunes, maybe he can hear them; we will try to comfort his broken hearted Ella, who, as the clergyman said, 'gave him peculiar confidence.' Austin is stunned completely. Let us love better, children, it's the most that's left to do."

In the postscript to this letter Emily dropped the moral, significant for artists:

"'Tis dangerous to value, for only the precious can alarm. I noticed that Robert Browning had made another poem and

Ancient bronze vessel of the Tsin period. At the Ton-ying Galleries.

was astonished—till I remembered that I myself in my smaller way sang off charnel steps. Every day life feels mightier and what we have the power to be, more stupendous."

The only thing I would like to point out is that two great artists were forming themselves in the stressful days of the civil war, but only long afterward was it seen that their art was true. There were apparently hundreds of more likely candidates for the war laureateship than Walt Whitman, whose book Emily herself had never read—she "was told it was disgraceful"—but he it was who finally and fittingly sang the nation's dirge for Lincoln.

In regard to style in war paintings it is within the bounds of reason to suppose that after the return of our troops to civilian life there will be more or less of a renaissance of pictures on the Meissonier and De Neuville types. There will be warriors, I can imagine, who will have a sentimental affection for the war trappings they will have laid [illegible] who will not be bothered by [illegible] of the pictorial reprod[illegible] all of the brave, and are sensitive to the genuine in art.

But that sort of thing is not deeply significant, and the war pictures cooked up from hearsay in studio will have no more chance of prolonged life than they have had heretofore. The formalists therefore who have been so greatly distressed by the attentions that have been showered upon the painters of the abstract and who have been crying on the housetops for vengeance, will not be heard. They will never again have an innings. Whatever else war may do it has a habit of putting periods in history. The cubists and the academicians will both go. A new chapter will begin, has at this moment begun. But the meaning of it and the strength of it will not be known for a decade.

Heine said that to the salonists of 1831